

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

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INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN
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LONDON FOR SEITZ

EO 11652: NA
TAGS: PINS, PINT, SL
SUBJ: SIERRA LEONE: WEEKLY ROUND-UP III, MARCH 23 - 30

REF: FREETOWN 990

1. MAJOR POLITICAL EVENT OF PAST WEEK HAS BEEN PRESIDENT STEVENS' CONTINUING "MEET-THE-PEOPLE" TOUR. FOR A MAN WHO IS NOT FACING ELECTIONS HIMSELF, HE ACTS AS THOUGH THE ELECTION WILL BE CLOSE. DURING THE WEEK STEVENS SPOKE TO THE POLICE, WHOM HE COMMENDED FOR THEIR CONDUCT DURING THE RECENT DISTURBANCES AND PROMISED NEW POLICE BARRACKS. HE ALSO JOURNIED TO PORT LOKO, KAMAKWIE, BAFODIA, KOIDU, KABALA, AND KAILAHUN FOR SPEECHES TO THE APC FAITHFUL - AND NOT SO FAITHFUL. IN KABALA, WE UNDERSTAND HE WAS APPALLED TO FIND RIVAL APC FACTIONS

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READY TO DO BATTLE. RATHER THAN RISK A MOB SCENE, HE CANCELLED HIS PUBLIC SPEECH AND SPOKE ONLY TO A SELECT GROUP OF NOTABLES, PARLIAMENTARIANS AND PARAMOUNT CHIEFS.

2. IN HIS MANY SPEECHES STEVENS STRESSED THE NEED TO MAINTAIN "PEACE AND ORDER" AND ASSURED PARAMOUNT CHIEFS, WHOSE SUPPORT MAY BE NECESSARY FOR ELECTORAL VICTORY, THAT THEY WOULD RECIEVE

FULL POLICE PROTECTION AT ALL TIMES. THE EMPHASIS ON "PEACE AND ORDER" CONTRASTED WITH HIS EARLIER PLEDGE TO ENSURE "FREE AND FAIR" ELECTIONS AND CAME ON THE HEELS OF MRS. GHANDI AND HER CONGRESS PARTY'S DEFEAT, WHICH WAS GIVEN PROMINENT ATTENTION WITH A FRONT-PAGE EDITORIAL, HEADLINED "TRIMUPH FOR DEMOCRACY" IN THE GOSL SPONSORED "DAILY MAIL". WE ARE CERTAIN THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MRS. GHANDI'S DEFEAT WAS NOT LOST ON EITHER THE PRESIDENT OR THE LETERATE ELECTORATE.

3. LABOR, SEIZING ON THE GOVERNMENT'S NEED TO MAINTAIN INDUSTRIAL CALM, ISSUED STRIKE NOTICES INVOLVING THE ROAD TRANSPORT CORPORATION, THE ELECTRICITY CORPORATION, AND THE NATIONAL DIAMOND MINING CORPORATION. GOSL INTERVENED IN FIRST TWO CASES TO BRING ABOUT SETTLEMENT FAVORABLE TO UNIONS, THUS PREVENTING STRIKES. RUMORS OF OTHER PENDING STRIKE NOTICES ARE CIRCULATING IN THE CAPITAL. ACTION OF LABOR CLEARLY IMPORTANT OVER NEXT MONTH.

4. DATES FOR NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS STILL HAVE NOT BEEN ANNOUNCED, NOR HAS PARLIAMENT BEEN DISSOLVED. ELECTION DAY LIKELY TO BE EITHER APRIL 29 OR MAY 6. ANNOUNCEMENT MUST COME SOON BECAUSE THE CONTINUING DELAY APPEARS TO BE ERODING FURTHER BOTH THE APC'S COHESIVENESS AND THE PRESIDENT'S POPULARITY. THE ONGOING QUESTION REMAINS WHETHER THE PRESIDENT WILL PERMIT OPPOSITION CANDIDATES TO CONTEST THE ELECTIONS "FREELY AND FAIRLY." IF OPPOSITION CANDIDATES ARE PERMITTED TO CONTEST IN THIS MANNER, SOME PREDICT THE APC WILL BE HARD PRESSED TO RETAIN CONTROL OF PARLIAMENT. FOR THE SAME REASON, MANY SAY THE APC CANNOT AFFORD TO ALLOW OPPOSITION CANDIDATES TO RUN.

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NEVERTHELESS CAMPAIGN POSTERS HAVE BEGUN TO APPEAR, PUBICLY, ESPECIALLY IN FREETOWN.

5. VICE PRESIDENT S.I. KOROMA RETURNED TO FREETOWN MARCH 30, AFTER A FOUR WEEK STAY IN A WEST GERMAN HOSPITAL AS A RESULT OF AN AUTOMOBILE ACCIDENT (FREETOWN 773). KOROMA WAS GREETED BY THOUSANDS OF JOYOUS FOLLOWERS, WHO HAD TO BE RESTRAINED BY A CORDON OF MILITARY POLICE. KOROMA, ALTHOUGH AMBULATORY, STILL IS ENCASED IN A BODY CAST AND IS EXPECTED TO RETURN TO GERMANY FOR FURTHER MEDICAL TREATMENT AFTER THE ELECTIONS. HIS ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS AND ENERGY HAVE BEEN SORELY MISSED BY THE APC.

6. IN ANOTHER ELECTION-RELATED EVENT, RECENTLY SACKED MINISTER FOR THE NORTHERN PROVINCE, A.B.S. JANNEH, WAS ARRAIGNED BEFORE A MAGISTRATE COURT AND CHARGED WITH "INCITEMENT TO BEHAVE IN A RIOTOUS MANNER." THE CHARGE STEMS FROM VIOLENCE THAT ERUPTED AT AN APC PARTY DISTRICT CONVENTION IN KAMBIA IN WHICH ONE MAN WAS KILLED AND OTHERS WOUNDED (FREETOWN 761).SAMUELS

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